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*The blessed Effect of a HOLY LIFE and
DAILY CONVERSATION with GOD,
exemplified in a short Extract of the Life
of ARMELLE NICOLAS, a poor
ignorant Country Maid.*

TO THE READER.

THE person, whose daily conversation is here described, was not long since a poor simple country maid, and servant to a great family in *France*. The whole course of her life was very instructive, and a most shining pattern of a true spiritual conversation. The particulars here related are taken out of the 18th chapter of the second part of her *Life*, giving great encouragement to a daily and uninterrupted conversation with God, and to walk before him as the omnipresent Lord and Father.

If we knew nothing else of Christianity, nor any other exercise but *this*, to spend one day after another in this manner, it would be sufficient. 'Tis very remarkable, that this person, who served God with unwearied prayer and watchfulness, was so ignorant, that she could neither read nor write, and withal a servant, constantly employed in business and hard labour. By this we see that the true service of God is spiritual, universal, plain and easy, so that no person can be excused from it by any pretence whatsoever.

*A CHRISTIAN'S Daily Conversation
with GOD.*

AS soon as I wake in the morning, *saiſt* *ſhe*, I throw myſelf into the arms of my heavenly Love, as a child into the arms of his father. I riſe with a deſign to ſerve and pleaſe him. And if I have time to pray, I fall upon my knees in his holy preſence, and ſpeak to him, as if I really ſaw him with my bodily eyes. I give myſelf up wholly to him, and deſire him to fulfil all his holy will in me, and that he would not ſuffer me that day to do the leaſt thing which might be offensive to him. Then I recommend to him all the prayers which ſhall be made that day. In ſhort: I love and praife him as much and as long as my affairs permit; tho' very often I have hardly ſo much time as to ſay the Lord's prayer. But I do not trouble myſelf about that; for I have God always in my heart, as well when I am about my buſineſs, which I do in obedience to his will, as when I retire on purpoſe to pray to him. This he himſelf has taught me, that whatever I do out of love to him, is a real prayer.

I dreſs myſelf in his preſence, and he ſhews me that his love ſupplies me with raiment. And when I go about my buſineſs, even then doth he not forſake me, nor I him, but he converſes with me, and I with him; yea, I am then as much united to him, as when I am

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at my prayers, set apart on purpose for my spiritual recollection. O! how sweet and easy is all labour and toil in such good company! Sometimes I perceive such strength and support in my mind, that nothing is too hard for me, and I think myself alone able to manage the affairs of the whole family. Nothing but the body is at work, the heart and myself burn with love in the sweet familiarity I entertain with God.

When I am about my business in the day-time, running up and down, till the body begins to be weary, or to repine, or to desire unseasonable rest, being oppressed with anger and uneasiness, my divine love enlightens me forthwith, and shews me, how I ought to suppress those rebellious motions of corrupt nature, and not to nourish them at all, either by word or deed. This love keeps the door of my lips, and watches over my heart, that it may not in the least contribute to such irregular passions, which thus are crushed and subdued as soon as they rise.

But if, at any time, for want of care, I am surprised with these or the like faults, I cannot be at rest, till I have obtained pardon, and God be reconciled to me. I lie prostrate before his foot-stool, confessing all my faults to him, as if he did not know them already; and there I continue, till he has forgiven me, renewed his friendship with me, and confirmed it more than before. For so it always happens through his infinite mercy, whenever I have committed a fault, which serves but to inflame
my

my heart more and more with his divine love. If people persecute me, and by foul and uncharitable censures raise scandals upon me, or any other way afflict me; or if evil spirits attack me with their crafty and cunning temptations, I then presently run to my heavenly Love, who readily stretches forth his sacred arms to receive me, shewing me his heart and wounds open for my security; in which I hide myself as in a strong castle and fortrefs. And then I am so mightily strengthened, that if the whole army of hell itself, together with all the creatures, should rise up against me, I fear them no more than a fly, because I am under the protection of the most high God, his love being the hiding-place and safe-guard of my soul.

If God at any time hides his face, making as if he would go away from me, I tell him; “ O! ’tis no matter, my Love, conceal thyself as much as thou pleasest, nevertheless I’ll serve thee; for I know thou art my God.” And then I stand upon my guard more than ever, to be faithful to him, for fear of displeasing my Love. And at the same time perceiving the greatness of my misery and poverty, I insist the more upon the merits of our Saviour, and resolve to rest contented, tho’ it should please him to leave me all the days of my life in such a condition. But he never lets me continue long under these circumstances, and if I may venture to speak, he cannot forbear loving me, any more than I can live without him.

If I am persuaded to be merry in company, I excuse myself. For nothing can be compared to the pleasures of my Love, which are so much the sweeter and greater, for my withdrawing from all company whatsoever. If they wonder, how I can stay always at home alone, I think within myself: "O! if you
 " knew the glorious company I have, you
 " would not say that I was alone; for I am
 " never less alone, than when I have nobody
 " with me."

The night coming on, and every one going to rest, I find rest only in the arms of divine Love: I sleep leaning on his holy breast, like a child in his mother's bosom. I say, I go to sleep, but being still busied about the love and praises of my God, till I fall quite asleep. Many times this Love rouses up all my senses, so that I cannot sleep the greatest part of the night, but I spend it in the embraces of the lovely grace of God, which never forsakes such a poor miserable creature as I am, but preserves me, and takes special care of me.

If in the night the evil spirits hover about, to torment or to surprise me, (which often happens) this divine Love guards me, and fights for me. Yea, it gives me grace too, to resist them courageously, as if I were awake. For they seldom continue long to assault me, unless it be in my sleep.

And this is the life I have led for these twenty years past, without perceiving the least change of that love which was poured out into my heart, after my sincere conversion

unto him. Nay, I have observed its daily increase, tho' every day it seemed impossible to endure any addition to what I already enjoyed. But truly, it is an infinite love, which satisfies and nourishes me, so that every day I have a new hunger, tho' methinks I can receive no more, than what I possess already every moment.

THE author of her life says, concerning the manner of her expressions, that they were always very modest, without any noise or vehemence: her common discourses were always holy and edifying; whereas others too commonly mis-spend their time in useless conversation and unprofitable talk. If she was in company, where they talked of indifferent or evil things, she had the faculty of giving them such a handsome turn, as to bring them quite off from that, to some good and useful subject.

For a long while she could bear no other discourse but of God and his holy Love. *I cannot imagine*, said she, *how a soul, created for heaven, can be concerned about the dross of this world.* From that time, if she happened to be in company, where the subject of the discourse was but indifferent, either she did not mind it at all, entertaining herself in the meanwhile with God; or, as soon as she thought it proper, she diverted and changed the discourse; thinking it but lost time, which was spent in the trifles of this world.

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To every body, that had a mind to be acquainted with God Almighty, she gave this advice: " To be silent, and to learn to keep
 " their thoughts together in the center of the
 " heart: for this (said she) is the beginning of
 " our union with God, and by these means
 " the soul forgets earthly things, and raises
 " herself up to the contemplation of heavenly
 " objects. We ought to lose our familiarity
 " with the creatures, if we desire to enjoy
 " the conversation of the Creator; a moment
 " of which doth afford more delight and
 " satisfaction, than all the finest discourses in
 " the world."

One time when her mistress was afraid that *Armelle* was like to run quite mad by an excess of devotion, she forbid her all spiritual exercises and would not let her go even to church, except on the Lord's day only: *Armelle*, being sensible of the false step her mistress took, smiled within herself, saying, " Truly I am not
 " mad, after I have found my Beloved, whom
 " I now love with all my heart. I remember
 " a time when I was seeking only God without me, and then I was mad indeed." This mistress of her's being of a sour and morose humour, shewed a deal of ill-nature to *Armelle*, of which, however, she never complained, but rather thanked God, that he was pleased to make this a means of her fuller purification.

" If (said she) the soul be but well grounded in the favour of God, and lively affected with the operations of his grace, all the in-
 " fults

“ fults of the devil, and of the creature, are
 “ borne with joy and comfort. But this is
 “ misery indeed, when the Lord himself with-
 “ draws from the soul, and lets her shift for
 “ herself. Then she thinks, that every step
 “ is a step into sin and corruption, being ut-
 “ terly unable to protect herself against it.”

In what company soever she was, she talked
 of nothing more, than of being *faithful to*
God. Nothing dropped more from her mouth,
 than, *Let us be faithful, let us be faithful to the*
Lord. This word she thought fit for any time,
 and suitable to every company. Now and
 then she would repeat it an hundred times
 over; and being asked by her friends, whether
 she had nothing else to say? She answered:
 “ Dont wonder at my laying this over and
 “ over again. If I should live a thousand years,
 “ I should still tell you the same thing. For
 “ 'tis faithfulness, wherein the perfection of
 “ a Christian life consists.”

Of the constraining power of the divine
 love she has the following expression: “ When-
 “ ever I happened to adhere a little too much
 “ to my natural inclinations, (apt to steal in
 “ upon the mind under the specious pretence
 “ of necessity) I was immediately reprov'd
 “ by the love of God. This divine love is
 “ like a careful tutor, who takes all the pains
 “ imaginable, for advancing his pupil in the
 “ way of learning he is engaged in; and for
 “ this reason keeps his eye constantly fixed
 “ on him, both to correct his failings, though
 “ never so small, and to prevent his being
 “ led

“ led away by any thing that might divert
 “ him from his chief employment. Thus *says*
 “ *she*, dealt the Lord with me. He kept me
 “ closely confined to an holy awe and wari-
 “ ness; and when I happened by one over-
 “ sight or other to withdraw, as it were, from
 “ his eye, he in that very moment pursued
 “ after me, and recalled me to my duty. But
 “ all this was done with so much love and
 “ tenderneſs, that it muſt be a heart of braſs,
 “ it not mollified by ſuch endearing marks
 “ of love and kindneſs.”

No ſooner was ſhe convinced of the will of
 God, but was very earneſt and diligent, to
 answer it preſently. She often wondered at
 ſome people's dilatory doings in the ſervice of
 God, and ſaid, it was a cunning fetch and
 ſtratagem of the devil, to make people put off
 from one day to another ſuch deſigns as might
 ſerve to advance the glory of God, and the
 good of our fellow creatures. “ *For*, ſaid ſhe,
 “ *it often happens, that that grace which at one*
 “ *hour offers itſelf to a man, in order to ſupport him*
 “ *under ſome difficult enterpriſes, is not ſo eaſily*
 “ *met with at another time.* And beſides this,
 “ how uncertain is our life! nay, if we were
 “ ſure to live longer, yet ought we not to
 “ linger upon that account at all, nor to de-
 “ fer from one day to another what might
 “ be done this day. A man that is full of
 “ delays in the ſervice of God, muſt needs
 “ have but little love at the bottom. *Wher-*
 “ *ever love is raiſed to any conſiderable degree,*
 “ *there the ſoul cant reſt, whiſt there remains*
 “ any

“ any thing to be done required by the beloved.
 “ And this dilatory temper, *she said*, was a
 “ great impediment in the way to perfection.
 “ Many souls were convinced of the will of
 “ God, but being too backward constantly
 “ to struggle against the corrupt propensions
 “ of their dull and lazy temper, they made
 “ but a slow progress in the work of religion.
 “ They say, to-morrow, to-morrow it shall
 “ be done in good earnest; but that to-mor-
 “ row never comes. The consequence where-
 “ of is, that the longer they flatter themselves
 “ in their disorderly and wonted customs, the
 “ less able they are to resist them at last at all;
 “ the Lord leaves them now to their own
 “ will, since they did not improve faithfully
 “ what once they had received.”

The virtue of humility was as remarkable
 in this holy maid as any of the rest; and it
 was grounded on a true and solid foundation
 too. She confesses herself, that the infinite
 love of God kept her undefiled as to the
 vanity of pride; insomuch that she did not
 know what pride and haughtiness was. “ I
 “ was astonished, *says she*, when I was told
 “ to watch against pride; for I thought whilst
 “ I was well in my wits, I could not possibly
 “ be proud.

And this was the reason, that she never
 would quit that manner of life she was bred
 to, though mean and contemptible in the eye
 of the world.

Even her spiritual friends would now and
 then most importunately intreat her, to resign

up to any body else her place, (which was that of a servant) and this under a fair pretence too, *viz.* That she might have the more leisure to give herself up to a contemplative life, and thus to enjoy the favours and gracious infusions of the Lord more abundantly.

“ She said, her outward employment and
 “ all the drudgery she was put to, did not
 “ at all cool or weaken the sense of the love,
 “ and of the gracious presence of the Lord,
 “ she usually enjoyed. Nay, the more fervent
 “ she was to spend herself entirely in
 “ works of charity, cheerfully complying
 “ with every thing incident to her life, the
 “ more plentiful incomes she had of the love
 “ and favour of God. Hence, it would be
 “ the effects of a false heart, if one should
 “ make bold to quit his outward employment,
 “ in order to gain more rest and quiet in another
 “ place. *God, says she, knows ways to*
 “ *find souls wherever they be, if they do not wil-*
 “ *fully shut their hearts against him.*

Because her love to God was so great and fervent, the love she bore to her fellow-creatures was also wonderfully influenced and inflamed thereby. When she considered the woful state of the wicked, and the dreadful judgment that is like to befall them at last, she then felt a more tender and commiserating love, and her very bowels began to yearn for compassion. When she looked upon the happy state she was arrived to, and the severe doom attending such profligate wretches, she used to say, “ She seemed unto herself like
 “ one that had been in a great storm at sea,

“ and by stress of weather like to be cast away
 “ every minute; but getting off at last safe
 “ and sound, remembered now ashore the
 “ dangers his brethren and near relations were
 “ still exposed to, being tossed up and down
 “ in the huge ocean, and left to the mercy
 “ of the roaring billows. Alas! *said she*, thus
 “ it is with me, when I lay to heart the dan-
 “ ger sinners run themselves into. For the
 “ more endearing marks of divine grace the
 “ Lord has been pleased to bestow upon me,
 “ the more fervent is my desire, that also
 “ others might partake of the same with me.”

And now, ye learned men, and refined wits
 of the age, come hither and admire the igno-
 rance and simplicity of this poor country-maid!
 Consider how far she exceeds your high flown
 superficial wisdom, and the dark flashes of
 human wit and learning? And was it possible
 for her, to attain to this *heavenly wisdom and*
divine knowledge, to such a nobleness and ele-
 vation of mind, without the scraps and affis-
 tance of artificial learning and philosophy? then
 truly, there must be another school wherein
 those that *flow unto the Lord*, (Ps. xxxiv. 5.)
are lighted. Indeed, *to know to love of Christ,*
passeth all knowledge. Eph. iii. 19. Concern-
 ing which our Saviour was pleased thus to
 express his grateful sentiments with hearty
 joy, and heavenly triumph: *I thank thee, O*
Father! Lord of heaven and earth, because thou
hast hid these things from the wise and pru-
dent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even
so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight,
 Mat. xi. 25, 26.